1; Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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the worse for their experience. Indeed, it may well be, as Nuer assert, that they are the better for it, for they lead a sluggish life. The blood is boiled by women till it is fairly consistent and can be used as a meat flavouring with porridge; or the men let it stand till it coagulates into a solid block, and, after roasting it in the embers of a fire, cut it up and eat it.

Nuer do not regard the blood of cows as a staple article of diet and it does not play an important part in their cuisine. Indeed, they say that they do not perform the operation to acquire food, though they confess that roasted blood is delicious, but for the benefit of the cows. Bleeding is designed to cure a cow of any unfitness by letting out the bad blood of the sickness. Also, Nuer say, it makes the cow fat, for next day it will be more lively and graze avidly. Bleeding, moreover, in their opinion, decreases the desire of a cow to be served. Nuer say that if a cow is served too frequently it may eventually become barren, whereas, if it is bled now and again, it will only require to be served once and will be in calf. Cattle are sometimes bled for medical reasons in the rainy season, when people may be so replete that the blood is given to the boys of the kraal and to the dogs. Sometimes they make incisions in the noses of calves and let the blood flow to the ground in order to make them fat. I have seen Nuer scarify their own legs and the small of their backs to induce fleetness and strength.

The following two points seem to us to be significant. (1) Whilst Nuer normally do not kill their stock for food, the end of every beast is, in fact, the pot, so that they obtain sufficient meat to satisfy their craving and have no pressing need to hunt wild animals, an activity in which they engage little. (2) Except when epidemics are rife the usual occasions of eating meat are ritual and it is the festal character of rites which gives them much of their significance in the life of the people.

V

Apart from milk, meat, and blood, cattle furnish Nuer with numerous household necessities, and when we consider how few are their possessions we can appreciate the importance of cattle as raw material. The bodies and bodily products of cattle have the following uses:

Their skins are used for beds, trays, for carrying fuel (Plate XVII), cord for tethering and other purposes, flails (Fig. 15), leather collars for oxen (Fig. 4), and for the tympana of drums. They are employed in the manufacture of pipes, spears, shields,

[p. 29 contains no textual material]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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●237 snuff-containers, &c. The scrota of bulls are made into bags to contain tobacco, spoons, and other small objects (Fig. 3). Tail-hairs are made into tassels used as dance ornaments by girls and to decorate the horns of favourite oxen (Plate IV). Their bones are used for the manufacture of armlets, and as beaters, pounders, and scrapers. Their horns are cut into spoons (Fig. 14) and are used in the construction of harpoons.

Their dung is used for fuel and for plastering walls, floors, and the outsides of straw huts in cattle camps. It is also employed as a plaster in minor technological processes and to protect wounds. The ashes of burnt dung are rubbed over mens' bodies, and are used to dye and straighten the hair, as a mouth wash and tooth powder, in the preparation of sleeping-skins and leather bags, and for various ritual purposes. Their urine is used in churning and cheese-making, in the preparation of gourd-utensils, for tanning leather, and for bathing face and hands.

The skins of sheep and goats are worn as loin garments by married women (Plate XXIII (*a*)), used as rugs to sit on, made into bags for storing tobacco and millet, and are cut into strips to be tied round their ankles by youths when dancing. Their dung and urine are not utilised.

231 The Bedouin Arab has been called the parasite of the camel.
237 With some justice the Nuer might be called the parasite of the cow. It may, however, seem that the list we have compiled does not cover a very wide range of uses, but so simple is Nuer material culture that it accounts for a very considerable part of their technology and contains items on which they are highly dependent, e.g. the use of dung as fuel in a country where it is difficult to obtain sufficient vegetable fuel for cooking, let alone for the large fires that burn day and night in every byre and windscreen.

231 We have seen that apart from their many social uses Nuer are directly concerned with cattle as producers of two essential articles of diet, milk and meat. We now perceive that the economic value of cattle is more extensive. Taking into consideration also the more general social value of cattle, briefly indicated in Section I, we may already note that there is over-emphasis on a single object, which dominates all other interests and is consistent with those qualities of simplicity, single-mindedness, and conservatism, so characteristic of pastoral peoples.

[illegible] pp. 16-19, cat. 116 —Analyst]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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135 Nuerland lacks the two raw materials that have played so important a part in the manufacture of primitive tools: iron and stone. Nuer have always been poor in iron objects. Till recently 411 they possessed very few iron spears, cherished as heirlooms, but used instead the straightened horns of antelope and buck, ebony wood, and the rib-bones of giraffe, all of which are still used to-day, 442 though almost entirely in dances (Fig. 11). Wooden hoes were used for gardening, and are still sometimes so used to-day. Iron 301 bells (Fig. 4) are rare and highly prized even at the present time, and in the old days iron rings and bracelets were important pieces of property. Wooden bells and ivory and leather rings and bracelets took their place in common use. Nuer have no knowledge of 325 smelting and little of the blacksmith's art. I have never seen a forge and, though there are certainly some blacksmiths, their art is crude and may be regarded as a recent innovation, at any rate in most parts of Nuerland. Spears bought from Arab merchants are beaten out in the cold.

135 Nuerland also lacks any kind of hard stone. Indeed, outside villages I have never seen a stone. They are sometimes brought 412 from neighbouring areas and employed as hammers, for smoothing 323 metal ornaments, for rubbing skins, and so on. Grinding grain seems to have been a recent introduction. The grinder is made from thornwood and the grindstone from baked marsh mud mixed with finely pounded potsherds (Fig. 12). With clay, mud, and sand, Nuer also make pots, grain-bins, pipes, toys, hearthstones, and firescreens; construct the walls of byres and huts; and coat floors and those parts of homesteads they wish to keep smooth and clean.

137 Nature, which denies them iron and stone, is niggardly in her gift of wood. Large trees are rare. Thornwood and low brush- 322 wood provide timber for building, spear-shafts, harpoon-shafts, clubs (Frontispiece and Plate VIII), pestles, neck-rests, baskets, and winnowing trays. Probably no trees in Nuerland are suitable for carving and Nuer possess no wooden utensils. Even the ebony they use for making spears is not found in their country. Ambatch-trees grow in some parts of the swamp areas and from it is made an object which serves as a parrying stick, tobacco pouch, pillow, and seat (Plate XXIX). Byre and kraal fires are fed with [372] dried dung, and wood fuel is only employed in the kitchen—grasses and millet stalks sometimes being used as a substitute. Grasses, millet stalks, and some plants are also used for various purposes: rafters, windscreens, thatching, cord, basketwork, &c. Gourds are cultivated for dairy utensils.

237 Lacking iron and stone Nuer thus make use of vegetable and earthy materials instead. Animal products are also a valuable

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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source of material, as may be seen in the list of the uses of the bodies and bodily products of cattle on pp. 28 and 30. The bodies of wild animals replace those of cattle in some, but not many, of these uses, e.g. the skins of tiang and cob are used as sleeping-rugs, waterbuck-skin for the tympana of drums, giraffe-skin for cord, the scrota of giraffe for bags (Fig. 3), the horns of buffalo for spoons (Fig. 14), and the bones and hides of various animals and the tusks of elephants for armlets, leglets, wristlets, finger-rings, &c., and so forth. They can further be employed, though here also to a limited extent, for purposes for which bovine products are unsuitable, e.g. hippopotamus- and buffalo-hide for shields and sandals, elephant-hide also being used for the second purpose; horns and ribs, as mentioned above, for spear-points; leopard- and genet-skins for ritual and ceremonial apparel; and so forth. Ostrich eggs and shells of the giant land snail are manufactured into waist-bands and the second are used for cutting heads of millet in harvesting.

I have indicated a few of the uses to which animal products are put to give the reader a general idea of the limitations imposed on Nuer economy by their environment and of the way they manage to overcome the natural poverty of their country. Taken with the earlier list of uses of cattle we can say that the Nuer do not live in an iron age or even in a stone age, but in an age, whatever it may be called, in which plants and beasts furnish technological necessities.

Deficiency of food and other raw materials can be corrected by trade. However, Nuer seem to have engaged very little in it. Many of their iron weapons and ornaments probably came through Dinka hands from the so-called Jur peoples (Bongo-Mittu group) and the iron-working sections of Dinka tribes to the west of the Nile. Much of it was doubtless booty, though some was certainly traded.[1] The Eastern Gaajak traded iron for ivory with the Galla of Ethiopia, but I doubt whether much iron came from this source before the Abyssinian conquest of the Western Galla towards the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the present century there was some trading of ivory from Nuerland to the Ethiopian markets at Gore and Sayo, and this went on till very recently. A considerable distance separated these markets from the main supply in the Zeraf Island, and people from Eastern Gaajak country in the dry season, at any rate in some seasons, took cattle, tobacco, and spearheads to the Zeraf and returned with ivory. A good tusk fetched up to twenty

[1] Poncet, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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233 136 [234] 233 136 372 •237 [232] 136

morn till nightfall and in the rainy season they are menaced by mosquitos as soon as the sun sets.

When the rains commence the cattle are taken back to the permanent villages and, as mosquitos become numerous, they are milked towards sunset and then at once tethered in the byres, the doors being closed after them. In the centre of each byre a huge fire of dried dung sends out clouds of smoke so dense that it is impossible for a European to remain there for several minutes. One cannot even see the cattle. One can only hear their movements as they chew the cud (*nyŏk*) and change their position. The smoke and heat are so oppressive that I have often wondered how either Nuer or their cattle survive the atmosphere night after night. Young men sleep on a platform above the fire and if the smoke becomes less dense one of them descends to stir up the fire and pile on more dung, for as soon as the smoke beings to clear—it escapes through the thatched roof—mosquitos enter. When the cattle are brought into the kraal before sunrise they are sleepy. I suppose that they have not had a very restful night in the stifling atmosphere of the byres. Nuer realise that the heat and smoke of the byres are bad for the cattle but they consider that mosquitos are worse. At the end of the rainy season and at the commencement of the dry season they leave the cattle outside till they go to bed themselves. Then they have to shut them in the byres because they would inevitably be devoured by lions if left all night unguarded in the kraals. They do not make up the fires so high at this time of the year for after the first millet harvest has been reaped mosquitos are far less numerous near the villages, since there is now no standing water and the grasses have been close-cropped on the ridges by the flocks and herds. Later those who still remain in the villages often erect windscreens in the kraals and spend the night with the cattle outside.

136

The worst months for mosquitos are July, August and September, when there is surface water and when the millet crop is well grown, for swarms of mosquitos shelter beneath the broad leaves of the millet during the heat of the day. As soon as the sun sets one hears Nuer slapping mosquitoes on their bodies as they sit by the kraal

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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233 512 [533] [264] they may have to defend them against carnivorous beasts and human raiders. Often they relieve the monotony and solitude by composing and chanting songs. Nuer say that most songs are invented in the grazing grounds. Herdsmen have a quick meal before leaving camp and, except when there are plenty of *heglig* fruits in the early part of the dry season, they will not have another bite till after sunset. However hungry he might feel no herdsman would milk a cow.

512 462 234 • 237 After the cattle have left camp the day is closed for the men, as far as routine cattle tasks are concerned, till they are brought back to the kraal in the evening; but women and boys continue their labours. Women milk the goats and sheep and prepare the morning meal. Boys spread out the cattle dung that has collected overnight so that it may dry in the sun and furnish fuel to replenish the household fires at night. They also smooth the part of the kraal occupied by their beasts by rubbing over the earth the nightly residue of ashes, urine, and dung. Boys assist in milking the goats and in taking the small calves to shade. They then take the larger calves and the [233] flocks to pasture. Older boys herd the calves and younger boys look after the flocks in the vicinity of the kraal. They spend most of the day playing games. If a small boy is hungry he catches a she-goat [857] and milks it, holding it by the horns with one hand while he pats its udder and squeezes its teats with the other hand from which he then licks the milk. Or he may suckle it. People do not object to small boys milking the goats they are herding. They are small and hungry and need all the food they can get to grow into strong men.

512 462 224 Not all the adult men have been idle while their womenfolk and the boys have been cleaning the kraal and milking. On most mornings parties of two and three leave camp at dawn with their dogs to pick up a gazelle or other small animal. They do not return to camp till after milking is finished, and those who set out at dawn to inspect their giraffe traps return about the same time. After the cattle have been loosened the men potter about for a couple of hours. Generally some of them are engaged in making utensils and ornaments or in dressing their hair.

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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512 226 883 About noon youths and maidens bathe in the river wherever a shallow sandy stretch offers a clear playground. They do the same at inland lakes but much time is there given also to fishing. The young people sit and splash in the water and the sexes flirt and wrestle in and out of the water. At about 2.30 they return to the camp where the girls churn the morning milk and pound and grind millet for the evening meal. The men turn over the drying dung with their sticks and then, having nothing more they need attend to, most of them return to their windscreens though one or two youths may try and spear fish in the shallows and they are joined there by older boys who are not herding the calves.

512 233 237 372 About 4-30 p.m. the small calves are brought from the shade where they have spent the day and are tethered in the kraal. The men hold them between their legs and lifting up their heads compel them to swallow water. At this time the boys bring back the larger calves and goats and sheep from grazing. Members of each household tether their animals. Generally one or two men now go out to meet (*luor*) the returning herd. Others gather the dried dung on hides from the heaps into which boys have swept it, and each owner of a windscreen makes up the evening fire on his hearth. There is no need to light the fires as they have been smouldering all day long and it is only necessary to clear away surface ashes and heap the new fuel on the exposed embers. Dense clouds of smoke arise and envelope the camp.

512 233 462 264 By 5 o'clock cows which have recently calved come running home and herald the approach of the herd which appears from 15 to 30 minutes later. Adult men tether the cattle of their household and women and boys commence at once to milk the cows and they finish this work before sunset. The women then prepare the evening meal and finish their dairy work. The men sit in their windscreens and await the meal which is served between 7 and 8 p.m. Nuer eat twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. The evening meal consists of millet porridge, with cheese or butter, or both, poured over it. The morning meal is generally the remains of supper heated up or with hot milk poured over it.

221 241 233 *March - April.* When the rains begin the old people return to the village for sowing.

June. The rest of the people follow with the cattle. The move from camp to village is direct, whereas in the move from village to camp there is an intervening period of wandering.

The Nuer year is therefore divided into two parts, consisting of a period in the villages and a period in the camp. This annual transhumance is necessary for the very existence of the Nuer. Rinderpest prevents complete dependence on cattle, so that they must have villages on highlands, with gardens, in order to grow the necessary supplies of grain. Climatic conditions prevent complete reliance on cultivation and the need of fresh pastures and water for the cattle forces them into dry-season camps near permanent supplies.

361 Homesteads may be strung out along sandy ridges with gardens at the back and grazing in front and the location and size of the villages depend on the distribution and extent of the higher ground suitable for cultivation. The direction of the dry-season movements are determined by ecological conditions. Transhumance enhances the importance of units larger than the villages which, for economic reasons, cannot easily maintain a self-sufficient isolation as do the Shilluk, Anuak, Acholi and Lango villages where the emphasis is on cultivation.

ECONOMY

The economic importance of cattle to the Nuer

231 262 Economically, cattle are chiefly important for milk and milk products, such as whey and liquid cheese. We are told that the Nuer value their cows according to the amount of milk they give.

Nuer eat meat boiled and roasted but, although they are particularly fond of it, they do not raise cattle for slaughter. It is considered that people ought not to kill cattle solely for food and, except on sacrificial and special occasions with a ritual aspect, the Nuer refrain from doing so. It is even thought that animals killed specifically for food might curse their owners.

Like other pastoral peoples in East Africa, the Nuer extract blood from the necks of their cattle and use it as a supplementary article of diet in dry season camps. The blood is boiled and taken with porridge as [252] flavouring or is allowed to coagulate into a block which is roasted and then cut in slices.

237 Milk, meat and blood are the food products derived from cattle but the herds also furnish the materials for implements and other necessary articles. Skins are used for sleeping on, for trays, for carrying fuel, making cord for tethering, leather collars for oxen and in making pipes, spears and shields. Tail hairs are used for ornamentation, bones and horns are used for instruments, scrapers and beaters. Cattle dung is used for plastering walls and floors of huts; dried dung is used for fuel and

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ashes from it are smeared over the body. Cattle urine is used in churning and cheese-making and also for washing. Evans-Pritchard rightly calls the Nuer 'parasites of the cow'.(1) 237

The social importance of cattle among the Nuer

The fact that cattle have more than an economic value may be amply illustrated from the part they play in social life. 231

Relationships with neighbouring tribal groups are partly dependent on the value attached to cattle. The Nuer are contemptuous of those who have no cattle, while they raid those who have in order that they may augment their own herds. A man will defend his cattle to the last and will die for the sake of the herds. Disputes within the Nuer tribe are often about cattle and about the ownership of pastures and water supplies necessary for their well-being. Cattle are paid in compensation for homicide and injury. It is the needs of the cattle which compel the yearly dry-season migration to fresh pastures. [721] [691]

Cattle form the bridewealth of the Nuer, that is, the successive transfers of cattle from the bridegroom's family to that of the bride marking the fact of marriage. Cattle are farmed out among friends as a precaution against the total destruction of a herd by disease; thus they tend to consolidate friendships and to maintain the network of relationships between people within a village and between the inhabitants of separate villages. [583] [572]

Family relationships are expressed in terms of cattle, as are the rules of incest and the status of an individual. Men take 'ox-names' - names which refer to the colour or other peculiarities of their favourite animals. In ritual cattle play an important part; they are sacrificed to the spirits and, when he desires to establish contact with ghosts and spirits, a man rubs ashes along the back of an animal, invoking the ancestral spirits as he does so. Cows are dedicated to the totemic spirits and the sky spirits. Daily life revolves round the needs of cattle; Nuer think cattle and talk cattle. Oxen are valued for display and prestige, and the merits of their favourite beasts are boasted of by their owners. Nuer language is rich in terms describing the various attributes of cattle. Tassels, decorations and carved tethering pegs are made by the owners, while the favourites in the herd will be played with, sung to and have poems made up about them. Young men will get boys to lead their favourite ox round the village for all to admire and will themselves leap behind it. Among the Nuer there is scarcely any aspect of life into which cattle do not enter and play an important part. Evans-Pritchard writes that the Nuer define all social processes and relationships in terms of cattle and that their social idiom is a bovine idiom. [551] [782] [192]

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(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.30.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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CHAPTER X

THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE

I

231 NUER are very largely dependent on the milk of their herds, and in their harsh environment they probably could not live without them, any more than the cattle could live without the care and protection of their owners. Their carcasses also furnish Nuer with [237] meat, tools, ornaments, sleeping-hides, and various other objects of domestic use; and their sun-dried dung provides fuel for the great smouldering smudges that give protection from mosquitoes to man and beast alike. Women are more interested in the cows, and this is natural for they have charge of milking and dairy work. Men's interest in the cow is, apart from their value for breeding, rather for their use in obtaining wives, and they are interested in the oxen for the same reason, and also because they provide them with a means of display and, which is the matter I am about to discuss, a means of sacrifice. But for all Nuer—men, women, and children—cattle are their great treasure, a constant source of pride and joy, the occasion also of much foresight, anxiety, and quarrelling; and they are their intimate companions from birth to death. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that Nuer give their cattle devoted attention, and it is not surprising that they talk more of cattle than of anything else and have a vast vocabulary relating to them and their needs.

231 Though I restrict myself here to a consideration of the religious 771 significance of their cattle for Nuer we must not for a moment forget that this is bound up with their secular uses. Otherwise it will not be appreciated what it is that Nuer surrender in sacrifice, the most precious thing they possess. Nevertheless, if cattle were only used for food and obtaining wives writers about the Nuer, and also about other Nilotic peoples, might have been content just to draw attention to the great interest these peoples have in them. But cattle figure so prominently in their lives in ways not directly concerned with their maintenance or their use for practical pur-